

re: Vinton Carter Park Sitk

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Record of Communication  
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FX-6 Personal Privacy

I visited with [REDACTED] FX-6 at his home at above address to discuss his previous employment at the Autolite Battery plant in Oakland. [REDACTED] FX-6

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He said only some supervisory staff & some office personnel went to the Visalia plant.

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[REDACTED] FX-6 said that none of the equipment from the Oakland plant went to Visalia except for maybe some burning racks. Some of the equipment went to the Canadian plant & some to the Atlanta plant. Most of the equipment, however, was sold to a guy in Mexico who operated 3 battery plants. [REDACTED] FX-6 couldn't remember if the oxide mill was scrapped or it was sold to someone. (The plant <sup>were</sup> <sub>(bldg.)</sub> made of brick).

FX-6

Certain depts ran 24 hrs/day - e.g.  
grid casting and the oxide mill. The oxide  
mill was the only dept that ran 7 days/week  
(except for holidays).

The winter-time was their busy season since  
cold weather is bad for batteries. Therefore, during  
their busy season, they couldn't make enough  
lead oxide from their own oxide mill & so  
they had to buy some from outside sources.

During the last 2 years of operation, the  
plant started to wind down its operations, &  
therefore the only depts that were still  
operating were: oxide mill, paste machine, grid  
casting machine and the forming room.

As previously stated, the oxide mill operated 24 hours/day, 7 days/week. Twenty or fifty pound "pigs" (lead bars) would be melted down and would then be sent via conveyor into a mold & shape the lead into small balls. It would have water running through it to cool it down. The lead balls would go down a shoot into a large drum ( $\sim 10' \times 6'$ ) where it gets turned into oxide (not sure of this process). The lead would then go into a large blender & be mixed. This was to keep the lead oxide (powder) from settling because then it would "cake up." The lead oxide would then be poured into  $\sim 30$  gallon drums ( $\sim 500$  lbs.) & the drums would sit, opened on top, ready for use by the pasting dept.

Employees were required to wear a mask in the oxide mill area since it was dusty, but many employees did not. FX-6 stated that the biggest problem here was the lead dust. You couldn't see the dust, but if you ran your finger along equipment or anything, there was always a dust layer. One of the main ways that employees got "leaded" was due to the lead dust that got under people fingernails. (3)

and then people would bite their nails.

The oxide mill had one smoke stack with filters that went to the outside. This smoke stack was over the lead pot. There was also an exhaust unit which blew fumes to the outside, but no dust. The oxide mill made about 20,000 pounds of oxide per shift. Since there were 3 shifts per day, this amounted to ~ 60,000 lbs. of lead oxide per day. In theory, the filters were supposed to catch all the lead dust from the smoke stack. FX-6 [redacted] wasn't sure of the size/amount of the filters for the smoke stack.

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said that [redacted]

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would periodically check

inside the plant to see how much lead dust there was in the air. He used a small electrostatic filter + used it in various locations throughout the plant, including around the oxide mill.

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said that there was an air washer set up by the oxide mill in order to trap fugitive lead dust. The air washer contained air + water in grids and once a year it was shut down to clean it out.

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stated that the company's main customers were Ford, Goodyear, Atlas(Std. Oil), John Deere, Mack Trucks, Int'l Harvester and Volkswagen. The "Autolite" (4)

battery was their own line and in the early 1960's (~1962/1963) Ford bought the Autolite name and a couple of the spark plug plants (in other parts of the US). Once that happened, the company changed its' name to "Prestolite". FX-6 [REDACTED] also stated that after ~ 5-7 years of owning the Autolite name, Ford got rid of it (sold it) to Bendix (which is an affiliate/subsidiary of Allied Signal). The Eltra Corp. took over Prestolite and then Allied acquired Eltra and still have the Atlanta, Redding, PA + Virginia operating. Allied then (Reading) sold the battery business to Exide Corp (Visalia + Manchester, Iowa). Exide operated the Visalia plant for ~ 2 years but the plant has since burned down.

I asked FX-6 [REDACTED] if he remembered there being any kind of presence by regulators. He said there was not. He didn't remember OSHA ever coming to the plant because he thought if they had, the plant would have been shut down. He did recall a large OSHA presence at the Visalia plant and OSHA was constantly overseeing what was going on there + worker protection was much better in Visalia than in Oakland.

I asked FX-6 [REDACTED] about lead dust coming from the oxide mill's smoke stack. He said he wouldn't be surprised if the lead dust travelled within a 10 block radius. He said he didn't recall (5)

that it was very windy around the plant, but thought that the wind came from the north. He did say that the wind patterns have probably changed over the years.

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FX-6 Personal Privacy He said the house was built in 1939, and the other <sup>neighboring</sup> houses were probably built around the same time as well.

I asked FX-6 if he remembers there being an explosion at the plant every morning. He said there was no explosion that he can remember & that batteries don't "explode". He said that the batteries would be charged-up at ~1000 at a time and sometimes there would be a "poof". But this would not be heard from outside of the building.

I asked FX-6 if there were any fumes or odors at the plant. He stated there were acid fumes from all of the sulfuric acid that was used. He said that lead does not have an odor, but it does have a taste (tarn) (sweet).

FX-6 talked about the forming room. This was the area where the batteries were made (come together). The dry charged batteries (where the acid was ~~added~~ added later) & the wet charged batteries (acid added)

would be made in the forming room. When making a battery, it required a negatively-charged plate and a positively-charged plate. A negative plate would be vacuumed + cooled in water + would come out very limp + contained minimal lead dust. A positive plate, however, would be baked in an oven + when you opened <sup>the door</sup> of the oven, a lot of lead dust would come out (due to the baking process).

Prior to creating the plates, the grids would be made. Essentially the grid was what would be holding the lead paste together since it is the lead that holds the charge for the battery.

After the plates came out of the oven, you would brush off the lead dust off of the plates. The "element" for the batteries would be several charged plates (anywhere from 7-15 plates for auto battery + 17-32 plates for truck batteries).

FX-6 stated that, by weight, ~90% of a battery is lead. The container was made of plastic or hard rubber.

FX-6 said that the plant would recycle any excess lead + send it to the lead smelter (off-site - e.g. sweepings/returned batteries). The plant did have a scrap-pile pot which contained mostly plates + would be melted to sludge, dried + pumped to be molded + make lead pigs for re-use (not used for the oxide mill however, since that lead

needed to be pure.

I asked FX-6 if there were any pumps in the plant for sulfuric acid or any other usage. He said there weren't any pumps, that there were floor drains on tile floor to handle the acid. The floor drains then went to the public sewer system, as far as he knew. He said the acid was stored in tanks (<sup>(10' x 12')</sup> made of lead) which were outside. The acid would be brought to the plant by train & then pumped directly from the train's tank into the acid tank at the plant. FX-6 said that a standard auto battery contains about 1 quart - n 1/2 gallon of acid & it is the acid that sets off the charge (which is in the plates).

FX-6 stated that the acid fumes at the plant were so strong that it would end up eating through the clothing that you wore. Therefore, coveralls & leather gloves were provided.

FX-6 stated that FX-6 he "got leaded" FX-6 and out of work FX-6 Personal Privacy His symptoms were:

aching bones, aching joints, high fever, vomiting & becoming delirious. He said he thought he got leaded because he wasn't as careful as he could have been. He was a smoker, and he'd taken ⑧

a smoking break without first washing his hands & he didn't always use the masks that were made available to the workers.

FX-6 [REDACTED] stated that the high lead areas were: oxide mill, paste mixer, paste machine, hagie burner (after stacking, burn the element with the torch) and the stacker (handling plates & also stacking the elements).

FX-6 [REDACTED] stated that there was a class-action lawsuit filed by the workers at the Visalia plant. He said they couldn't sue the company itself (for reasons he didn't know), so they sued the manufacturers of the equipment at the plant. The case has since been settled. He was not part of this suit

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FX-6 [REDACTED] recalled the following former employees that I could talk to (he wasn't sure if any of them were still alive):

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